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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH ARMENIAN DEPUTY FONMIN ON TIP

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1. (SBU) SUMMARY. DCM met with Deputy Foreign Minister Tatoul Margarian, who oversees the GOAM Interagency Commission to Address Issues Related to Human Trafficking (TIP Commission), to discuss concerns that the GOAM has been slow to take visible, concrete steps to combat trafficking in persons in recent months. DCM made it clear that in determining tier placement this year, G/TIP would be looking closely both at follow-up on previously reported trafficking arrests and investigations and GOAM initiatives to combat, prevent and prosecute trafficking in persons. Margarian was displeased with the possibility that Armenia might slip back to Tier 3, but receptive to our recommendations and the need to work closely with the Embassy to ensure that we have complete information on GOAM actions in this important area. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) DCM expressed concern that following the promotion of the head of the TIP Commission to another agency, the Commission's activities decreased considerably and that slow deliberation over the GOAM's ratification of the National Plan of Action (NPA) impeded implementation of key goals. Margarian admitted that progress on TIP might have been slow, but emphasized that there have been positive developments. He noted that the issue of trafficking in persons is a sensitive one, crossing many sectors, and has no unequivocal solutions. However, he agreed that now that the NPA has been ratified, the GOAM must put greater emphasis on implementation.

3. (SBU) Margarian was presented with the Department's country strategy, brief project descriptions of USG-funded counter-trafficking initiatives, and questions provided as guidance in preparation of the annual TIP report. He immediately called one of his staff in our presence to discuss our request for information in preparation of this year's TIP report and confirmed that we could expect answers to our inquiries by 10 February. This will allow us to work with the TIP Commission to identify gaps in key areas that might be addressed in the near term. (NOTE. The TIP Commission met later that day. An informal readout of that meeting by one of the members indicates that Embassy's concerns were discussed at length. The Procurator General's Office made an appeal to the Commission members to provide complete and honest information on the work that has been done, especially in the area of law enforcement efforts. END NOTE.)

4. (SBU) The recent case involving Uzbek women trafficked to Armenia for sexual exploitation, which Margarian was unaware of, was discussed at length. Although indications that Armenia may be a destination country for trafficking victims is a concern, we are very encouraged by law enforcement's proactive role in arresting alleged traffickers and opening a criminal investigation. Moreover, we are very pleased that law enforcement swiftly identified the trafficking victims among the arrested and referred them to a local NGO providing trafficking victim assistance under the auspices of an USG-funded program. (NOTE: The case comes on the heels of OSCE-IOM-U.S. Embassy co-sponsored training on victim identification and NGO referral mechanisms. END NOTE)

5. (SBU) DCM took the opportunity to bring up concerns about police handling of some aspects of the case and emphasized the need to ensure victims' anonymity and engage them with respect and compassion. Margarian agreed that there is room for improvement in law enforcement's interaction with trafficking victims, but attributed any shortcomings primarily to over zealotness. (COMMENT: Embassy has had discussions with various interlocutors on the specifics of this case, all of which indicate that over zealotness is likely the root cause behind shortcomings in the treatment of victims. Most interlocutors agree that

given the positive steps forward by law enforcement on this issue, international organizations and local NGOs should continue to engage law enforcement in a proactive way, rather than alienating them with harsh criticism. END COMMENT.)

16. (U) Lastly, DCM raised the issue of bilateral law enforcement cooperation with key origin, destination and transit countries, especially the U.A.E. and Uzbekistan. Margarian indicated that there are no current bilateral agreements with Uzbekistan, although law enforcement reports that a letter of request has been sent to their counterparts in Uzbekistan on the current trafficking investigation. A bilateral treaty is in place between Armenia and the U.A.E.; however, there are no specific provisions regarding trafficking in persons. This is an issue that the Embassy will continue to follow closely in Armenia.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Perhaps the single most important point emphasized during the meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Margarian is the need for the GOAM to "take ownership" of efforts to combat and prevent trafficking in persons in Armenia. Despite the GOAM's willingness to participate in various events developed by local NGOs and international organizations, the perception both in Armenia and abroad is that the GOAM is not taking its own initiatives. This is an important nuance that has been lost on many key GOAM officials to date. Overall, the Embassy believes the meeting was well received and has helped to reinvigorate GOAM's attention to this critical issue. END COMMENT.

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